

Hall Helps Congress Pass Increase in Veterans' Disability Compensation and Improve Rural Veterans' Access to Health Care

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, spoke on the House floor today in support of two measures to improve veterans' benefits: one measure to increase veterans' disability compensation rates and a second measure to create a pilot program to allow veterans living in rural areas to get health care closer to home.

S. 2617, which passed the House today, would increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the death benefits for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

"With today's military and veteran community facing increasing deployments, a struggling economy, rising gas prices, and other hardships that together create tough financial situations, this legislation could not have come at a better time," said Hall on the House floor. "For many of our nation's veterans and their families, these payments are a necessity in order to make ends meet."

The cost of living adjustment increase provided in the legislation will boost wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for benefits, and even things such as clothing allowances. S. 2617 passed the Senate this summer and will now be headed to the White House for the President's signature.

The other bill Hall spoke on today, H.R. 1527, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program to make health care more accessible to veterans in rural areas. It would allow those veterans living more than 60 miles from the nearest VA facility providing primary care services or more than 120 miles from a VA facility providing acute hospital care to receive health services through providers outside the VA health care system.

"Veterans have been consistently calling on the VA to develop a plan to address the needs of those veterans who live in rural areas at great distances away from the nearest VA hospital," said Hall. "With the recent increases in the cost of gasoline, travel for rural veterans is placing an even greater financial burden on them and their families. Hours of driving and a hefty gas bill are not the kind of treatment our veterans deserve for their selfless sacrifice to our nation."

The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act passed the House unanimously and is now headed to the Senate for further consideration.